

The Overland Telegraph Fleet No 3: Paddle-Steamer *Young Australian*

The *Young Australian* was a small side-wheel paddle steamer built in England for use as a tug and lighter vessel at Port Adelaide: it went into service in June 1854. As well as work around the port, it also made pleasure excursions along the coast and to Kangaroo Island.

In November, it ran aground attempting a rescue operation for another vessel and was declared a wreck. However, the following year, it was repaired by its new owner and returned to Port Adelaide where it operated for the next 16 years.

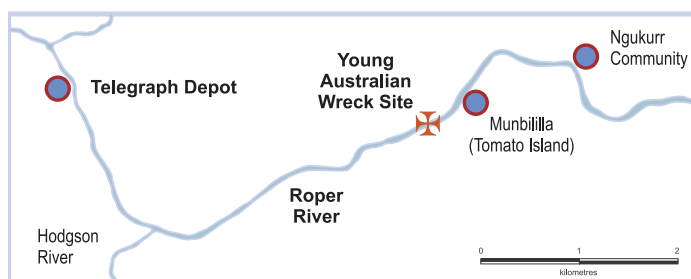
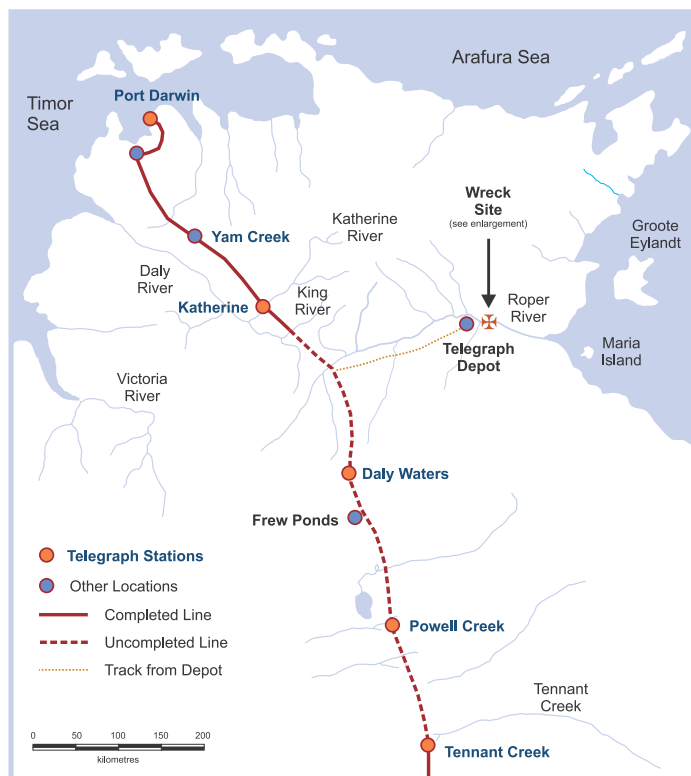
Needing a vessel able to operate in the Roper River to supply the Overland Telegraph construction parties, the SA Government purchased the *Young Australian* in December 1871. The steam-tug performed as expected and saw the successful completion of the project. Then, unfortunately, it ran aground in December 1872 and, despite efforts to refloat it, the *Young Australian* had to be abandoned.

All that remains today are its engine and boiler.

The *Young Australian* is the only paddle-steamer wreck in the Northern Territory and was declared a Heritage Object under the Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act on 24 November 2002.¹

The *Young Australian* was built in 1853 by Money Wigram & Sons in their Blackall yards in London for Joseph Lukey, a mariner. It was registered in October and loaded in London on 1 November 1853 when Lukey, with a crew of seven, set sail for Melbourne. (As well as having steam-driven paddlewheels, the *Young Australian* was schooner-rigged with a mast fore and aft, enabling it to take advantage of favourable winds and save fuel.)

The wooden vessel was 29 metres long and 5 metres wide, powered by a nominal 40 horsepower side-lever steam engine of the “grasshopper” type, so-called because the fulcrum (pivot) was at one end of the lever and the up-and-down motion resembled the movement of the insect (see next page). Side-lever engines were commonly used in ships because most of the weight was placed low in the hull. The single cylinder was mounted vertically with the piston rod emerging at the top and connected to a crosshead. From here a drive rod at each side of the cylinder was connected to one end of a side lever and the other end was fixed with a suitable pivot bearing: both side levers moved in unison. (The levers are “second class” with the load between the effort and the fulcrum.) A cross-piece connected between the levers drove the single connecting rod and cranks which imparted

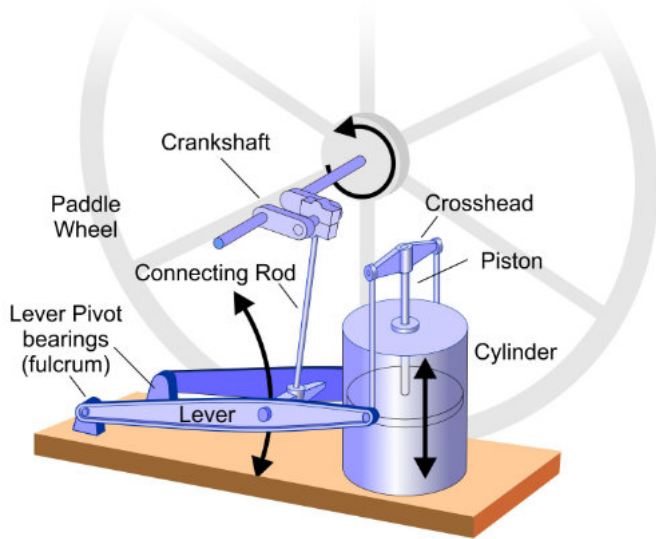


Top: A map showing the location of the Roper River depot in relation to the unfinished section of the Overland Telegraph Line

Above: Detail showing location of the wreck site

motion to the paddlewheel shafts. This arrangement could be clearly seen in what remained of the wreck.²

Joseph Lukey had made his first trip to Australia in 1849 as master of the barque *Susannah*.³ The purchase of the *Young Australian* was the start of a new career as a ship-owner, surveyor, and agent based in Melbourne. He arrived there on 4 March 1854 after a journey under canvas of 91 days⁴ and sold the vessel to Captain James Lawrence. The standing and running gear used for the trip from England had been removed and sold separately by



Sketch showing the principle of the single-cylinder side-lever "grasshopper" engine installed in the *Young Australian*
[Drawing: Richard Venus]

auction.⁵ There'd also been a slight mishap when Lukey ran into a stranded lighter in the Yarra one night and was found liable for the damage.⁶ This was just the first of many collisions in the *Young Australian's* working life.

First Life, 1853-1854

Lawrence brought the steamer back to Port Adelaide, making the trip in 61 hours. The *Adelaide Times* said, "If this trip is a fair specimen of her capabilities we may congratulate her proprietor and ourselves on such a valuable addition to our local shipping."⁷ The *Register* noted that, although the engine was rated at 40 horse-power, "it is capable of being worked up to 77-horse".⁸ Lawrence advertised that this "new and powerful vessel" would be available for towing in the river or gulf.⁹ With true entrepreneurial spirit, he also advertised "an excursion trip to American River, Kangaroo Island", adding:¹⁰

... there is reason to believe that those who take advantage of the opportunity will not only derive much satisfaction from the present excursion, but by their reports of the local scenery or capabilities, induce other colonists to avail themselves of the steamer's future services, in visiting the other ports and anchorages of the colony, and rendering familiar to themselves by personal inspection, and to the colonists in general by accurate description, localities which have been too long neglected or misrepresented.

The excursion trip took place on Monday 26 June 1854 with a number of Lawrence's friends and "other gentlemen interested in the shipping at Port Adelaide" aboard. They didn't make Kangaroo Island but turned around at Brighton and dinner was served in the rather snug cabin on the way back. Lawrence took the opportunity to demonstrate the steamer's capability by towing a barque laden with hay off a sandbank and then bringing a brig from Sydney from the lightship into the port. Free of his duties, he then persuaded his guests to stay on board for "one glass more".¹¹

The *Young Australian's* first formal engagement was on 29 June when it towed the *Symmetry* down stream.¹² On another occasion, it served as a tender ferrying passengers and luggage from the wharf to the steamship *Norna*.¹³ Lawrence also persisted with his idea of "pleasure cruises", advertising trips along the coast on Saturdays with a band on board and refreshments available, returning in time for the evening omnibus to town, for just ten shillings.¹⁴

The towing business, however, was not all smooth sailing. There was some rivalry with a government-owned tug and, in an opinion piece, the *Adelaide Times* said Lawrence's "meritorious efforts have not met with the cordial sympathy and support which unquestionably they deserved". As an example, the *Times* talked about the immigrant ship *Pestonjee Bomanjee* which arrived in the Gulf on 7 October and signalled for a tug. Lawrence responded but, when he pulled alongside, he was told that the signal was for the government tug. The pilot had told the captain that, if he used the *Young Australian* instead, he would have to pay for both. The *Pestonjee Bomanjee* then waited another hour and a half to be towed to its mooring. The *Times* concluded that the pilot had exceeded his authority and they were satisfied "that the Trinity Board had no knowledge of the improper influence exercised by their servant to the injury of Captain Lawrence". They also pointed out that, recently, the government tug had been laid up for some months for repairs and during that time the *Young Australian* "was readily and largely availed of".¹⁵

Perhaps it was frustration with business in the port that encouraged Lawrence to accept a charter to salvage the barque *Nene Valley* which had been wrecked near Cape Northumberland, South Australia's southern-most point.¹⁶ The *Nene Valley* had left London on 20 June, bound for Portland in Victoria. It was several days over-due when the captain and one of the passengers rode into Portland on borrowed horses to report that the ship had run aground about midnight on 19 October.¹⁷ Cancelling a planned excursion to Port Lincoln ("It will be necessary for gentlemen to provide their own bedding."), Lawrence, with a crew of eight, reached the *Nene Valley* on 13 November and prepared to take off salvaged materials the next day. However, at 3 o'clock in the morning, an unexpected squall blew up, snapping the anchor cables and lifting the *Young Australian* onto the reef: heavy seas then drove it across to the other side. The *Adelaide Observer* said:¹⁸

We learn further that when Captain Lawrence left the *Young Australian* she was so entirely broken up as to be worthless. The accident, however, was not accompanied by any loss of life, and before Captain Lawrence left Port Adelaide he took the precaution to effect insurance on the vessel to an amount which will nearly cover his loss.

Ironically, it was James Lowrie, then captain of the *Havilah* which was passing, who first reported the loss.¹⁹

Second Life, 1855-1871

Lawrence lost no time in advertising the wreck of the *Young Australian* for sale²⁰ and it was purchased at auction by Joseph Coleman for £26 10s.²¹ Like Mark Twain's death,

the wreck of the *Young Australian* seems to have been greatly exaggerated because, ten months later, Coleman's brother George and Captain William Wells were able to get the little tug off the reef on their third attempt, and tow it back to Port Adelaide, arriving on 14 July.

The *Register* said:²²

... the unanimous opinion seemed to be, that the *Young Australian*, after undergoing some inconsiderable repairs, might shortly resume her employment as a tug-boat with profit to her owner and advantage to the public ... the most material parts [are] still connected and but little hurt by rust ... A few planks, which were sprung on the bilges, have been replaced, and the machinery has not been neglected, even whilst she lay at Cape Northumberland.

By November 1855, the *Young Australian* was relaunched and "in the stream" with William Wells at the helm.²³ Coleman applied to the Trinity Board for a towing licence²⁴ and, taking a leaf out of Lawrence's book, advertised an excursion trip to the Glenelg Regatta: the ticket price of 10 shillings included a cold collation but wine and spirits were extra.²⁵ (Coleman would later become licensee of the Exchange Hotel.²⁶)

Although only licensed to tow vessels up to 800 tons, the *Young Australian* showed its mettle one day in 1856 when it towed the 1001 ton *Theodore* from the wharf across the bar and into the Gulf 20 minutes faster than the government tug *Adelaide*, which had started before it, towing the 924 ton *Nimroud*.²⁷ The *Young Australian* also charged the same towing fees as the government tug.²⁸

In January 1861, in reporting the journeys made by steamers operating between Adelaide in Melbourne, the *Advertiser* also noted that the *Young Australian* had made "some score of runs to Nepean Bay [Kangaroo Island], and two or three to Yorke's Peninsula".²⁹

Third Life, 1871-1872

Towards the end of 1871, the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line – the prize that South Australia had audaciously snatched from under the nose of Queensland – was in trouble. Progress on the Northern section had come to abrupt halt in May when the contract was cancelled by the government overseer but the news didn't reach Adelaide until 8 July when he stepped off the government schooner *Gulnare* in Port Adelaide and dropped his bombshell. Railway engineer Robert Patterson was quickly appointed to take over the project and within a few weeks he had organised a construction crew and set off for the Northern Territory.

Arriving in Port Darwin on 24 August, he had four months in which to finish the work by the contract deadline of 31 December 1871. Towards the end of October, he came to the conclusion that he needed more materials and supplies. His request for reinforcements took a tortuous path via a Dutch warship to the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia); then by another ship to Port Galle in Ceylon (Sri Lanka); then on the regular weekly mail service to King George's Sound (Albany) in Western Australia; and finally onto the branch mail steamer. Dated 25 October, it reached Adelaide on 27 November.³⁰



The Young Australian at Port Adelaide, c1867; clearly visible are the smokestack, a single fore-mast, and the light-coloured starboard paddlebox [State Library SA B6268]

This time, it was recognised that the Roper River would be an essential supply route to get men and materials to the Line which had only progressed as far south as the King River and the Government began to charter vessels, including two steamers, "if they can be procured".³¹ The barque *Bengal*, loaded with plant and materials to construct the telegraph stations and with a number of passengers, was supposed to start "at once" but, in the end, didn't depart until 23 August.³²

In June that year, William Wells had decided to package his two steam-tugs, the *Young Australian* and the *Eleanor*, into a proprietary company, offering 180 shares of £50 each and his services as manager and undertaking not to start any competing business.³³ A prospectus was issued for the South Australian Steam-tug and Lightering Company (Limited)³⁴ but Wells then seems to have found a better option. On 9 July, the *Young Australian* towed the *Gulnare* out to the lightship from whence it returned to Port Darwin.³⁵ A few days later, a *Register* correspondent reported that "the powers that be have conceded that a steamer is required for the Roper, and in furtherance of this idea have been in treaty with the owner of the *Young Australian* to send her round".³⁶

The likely purchase of the *Young Australian* was still being talked about in November;³⁷ meanwhile Wells was continuing to operate the *Eleanor*.³⁸ Finally, in mid-December, the *Evening Journal* announced that the *Young Australian* "has been selected by the Government to proceed to the assistance of the Northern Territory telegraph constructors ... and has changed hands at £3,500". However, ownership would only be transferred once the little steamer had been safely delivered at Port Darwin and H R Marsh, "a navigator of acknowledged



*The Young Australian at the Roper River, moored alongside the Omeo; to the right is the Bengal
[Photograph by Captain Samuel Sweet, State Library SA B4641]*

ability”, was appointed as captain. Then, “for some unexplained reason the appointment of Captain Marsh was objected to on the part of the Government” and Colin McLachlan, master of the Government schooner *Flinders* was selected; but then an insurance company objected to his lack of experience in the Torres Strait. Finally, James Lowrie, “who has been well and favourably known during the past 20 years”, was appointed.³⁹

Pausing only to have his portrait taken, Lowrie began his preparations. It took nine days to make the *Young Australian* ready for its voyage: the work included fitting masts fore and aft, a similar configuration to that used for its delivery voyage from England. It would travel around Western Australia in order to take advantage of the prevailing winds. When they were favourable, the paddles would be removed from the wheels and the sails hoisted, enabling it to still make about four or five knots while saving fuel. It left Port Adelaide on 23 December 1871.⁴⁰ Several breakdowns occurred (“but none of importance”) and the *Young Australian* reached King George’s Sound (Albany) on 31 December. After loading with coal, it departed on 3 January for Fremantle to take on board firewood.⁴¹ On 23 January 1872, the *Young Australian* dropped anchor at Port Darwin and Government Resident Bloomfield Douglas officially took possession of it on behalf of the SA Government. It steamed out of the harbour on 26 January and reached the Roper on 1 February.

At the Roper River

NOTE: Unless otherwise referenced, the salient facts of the Young Australian’s time at the Roper River which follow are taken from Captain James Lowrie’s journal covering the period 1871 to 1873.⁴² Where there are differences with other published accounts and reports, Lowrie’s version is used.

The *Omeo* had arrived at the mouth of the Roper on 27 January 1872, expecting to find the *Young Australian* already there. Captain George Calder was prepared to wait for a few days, but Charles Todd gave him an indemnity for any loss or damage and the *Omeo* was cautiously taken over the bar and into the river. It ran aground about 50 miles upstream and was unloading its cargo of horses when the *Young Australian* arrived on 3 February. Some of the cargo was transferred and the *Young Australian* took it and a number of men including Todd and Robert Patterson to the jetty at the depot which had been established on the southern bank, upstream of the Hodgson. The *Young Australian* then took the *Bengal*⁴³ in tow but the *Omeo* ran aground again and the *Young Australian* went to its assistance, finally getting it to the depot on 8 February. It brought up the *Bengal* the next day and the three vessels – the big steamer, the barque, and the tug – made a fine sight which was captured by Samuel Sweet, former captain of the now disabled schooner *Gulnare* and an enthusiastic photographer.



The wreck of the Young Australian in April 1889 [State Library SA B10132]

The next vessel to be towed was the 800 ton steamer *Tararua*⁴⁴ which had loaded at Port Adelaide at the end of January and reached the Roper on 3 March. First the *Young Australian* offloaded some stores and took them to the depot; then returned to assist the steamer upstream. While mooring, the two vessels collided, causing “considerable damage to the aft of the smaller vessel”. When it left on 20 March, the *Young Australian* followed the *Tararua* downstream and took it in tow when it started to have steering problems. The steamer, piloted by Captain Sweet, was travelling too fast for the conditions and constantly running aground or colliding with the tug. To add insult to injury, the *Tararua*’s crew had helped themselves to the wood which had been stockpiled by the *Young Australian*’s crew. Lowrie was glad to see the back of it.

The *Bengal* was towed to Maria Island⁴⁵ in early April and the *Young Australian* then left the depot on 21 April to take Charles Todd and others to Darwin. The journey took 18 days because of the need to frequently stop and cut more wood for the boiler. Coal was purchased in Darwin and the return trip, also with Todd on board, only took nine days.

The final join in the Overland Telegraph Line was made by Robert Patterson on 22 August 1872. A few days before, he had telegraphed to Adelaide requesting that a steamer be at the Roper by 21 September to take the men home and the *Omeo* was chartered for this service.⁴⁶ By the middle of September there were several hundred men waiting at the depot. The *Young Australian* ferried the first lot of men, including Patterson, to Maria Island on 18 September. The second trip was made on 27 September. The *Omeo* arrived on 9 October⁴⁷ and departed on 11 October. After some delays and heavy weather, it reached Port Philip Heads on 8 November where those wanting to get off in Melbourne transferred to a tug. By the evening of 10 November, the *Omeo* was off Semaphore and, the next morning, the telegraph constructors were able to catch the 9 o’clock train to Adelaide where Charles Todd met them on the platform.⁴⁸

Back at Maria Island, Lowrie was waiting for the *Springbok* which had left Melbourne on 5 October. He waited until 16 December before returning to the river. The cutter *Flying Cloud* then arrived and the *Young Australian* took it in tow, reaching the depot on 24 December. On the morning of 30 December, the *Young Australian* began towing the unladen *Flying Cloud* back down river.

Before he finally left the Roper River depot in early June, Charles Todd had instructed Lowrie:⁴⁹

... to take complete set of soundings in the Roper, from its mouth up to the landing; to buoy and beacon the bar end channel, placing substantial beacons on the north, and where required on the south bank, between the bar and the river entrance; to mark by beacons, lopped trees, or otherwise, the position of all rocks and shallows in the river; to plot on a general plan of the river the deep water channel, and depth of water at low water springs; and to keep a record of the rise and fall of tide, a tide-board being fixed at the landing. This appeared to me to be the most profitable way in which I could employ the *Young Australian*. I have not yet received Captain Lowrie’s report, but I understand he has carried out my instructions with much intelligence and zeal.

Despite this intimate knowledge of the river, Lowrie managed to run the *Young Australian* aground when, deceived by an unusually high tide, he misjudged a turn around an obstacle known as the North Rock: the *Flying Cloud* was able to steer clear and anchored mid-stream. As the tide fell, the stranded tug tipped backwards and water rushed in where the stern had been damaged when mooring the *Tararua* and extinguished the boiler fire. Everything possible was unloaded but the vessel was stuck fast. Lowrie even tried using four water tanks from the depot as floats but this was unsuccessful.

On 6 January 1873, senior government surveyor George McLachlan and Captain Henry Marsh from the *Flying Cloud* inspected the *Young Australian* and McLachlan



*One of the paddle wheels from the Young Australian set up on Groote Eylandt to power a sawmill
[Northern Territory Archives NTRS 337]*

recommended that the vessel be condemned because they had no way to refloat it. Unable to do anything more, Marsh and the *Flying Cloud* left a few days later. Lowrie, however, hadn't given up and made several attempts to blast away some of the rock. In the meantime, the long overdue *Springbok* had arrived with coal, iron Oppenheimer poles (which would be used to replace wooden poles damaged by termites), and supplies. Without the *Young Australian* to transfer it to the depot, all the cargo had to be offloaded at Maria Island. Then, on 19 February, the rapidly rising river tipped the *Young Australian* from its port side onto its starboard side and it was slowly covered by flood waters. Lowrie wrote in his journal:⁵⁰

It being now out of my control to do anything for her until the river falls and salvage appliances and labour are obtainable. After much consternation I am to proceed to Maria Island and wait the arrival of vessels in either April or March. It ails me to look at the channel and bar

Lowrie and his crew continued to maintain and repair the channel buoys and beacons, and ferried materials, equipment and people between the Island and the depot in available boats. The rains returned in April and Lowrie said he and his men were like "half-drowned rats". He returned to Maria Island in early May, so ill that he was unable to continue his journal.

Fate of the *Young Australian*

With the Overland Telegraph work parties gone, there was not much going on along the river. There were occasional reports of the wreck from travellers. In October 1873, a correspondent told the *Clare Northern Argus*, "About 30 miles above the horse camp the *Young Australian* lies with her bows in the air and her stern in the water."⁵¹

In 1908 the Church of England Missionary Society established the Roper River Mission on the northern bank, about 40 miles from the river mouth. In 1913, the Reverend Hubert Warren was posted there from Melbourne and the following year was made Superintendent.⁵² In 1915, Warren and another man visited Groote Eylandt, making "extensive explorations,



*Unveiling the Engineers Australia plaque and interpretation panel, 23 May 2011: from left, Trevor Horman, Kezia Purick, Eddie Webber, Gordon Atkinson, Owen Peake, and Bronwyn Russell
[Photo: Engineers Australia]*

and [drawing] a number of maps and plans". Warren was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in recognition of this work, .

Five years later, the Society was granted 100 square miles on the island to establish another mission station. Warren had noted that the island was heavily timbered with two significant rivers.⁵³ Before his ordination, Warren had completed an apprenticeship with Melbourne marine engineers, Robison Brothers & Co.⁵⁴ The significance of the wreck of the *Young Australian* was not lost on him: armed only with a hacksaw and determination, Warren removed one of the paddlewheels and took it to Groote Eylandt, setting it up on the Emerald River to use as a water wheel to generate electric power for a sawmill.⁵⁵

The paddle wheel served its new purpose satisfactorily until its foundations were washed away in a flood.⁵⁶

Some years later, another missionary, Philip Taylor, "used the same idea effectively in placing in position a properly constructed waterwheel, having diverted part of the stream into a concrete race. With this he can develop two to three horse-power, and will be able to do all that Mr. Warren formerly planned."⁵⁷

In 1934, A G Macdonald, a correspondent to the *Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, recalled seeing the wreck when he was a mounted constable in the Territory.⁵⁸

The "Young Australian" was a paddle steamer, and her ribs were then on the rocks. We would have liked very much to have made a closer examination, but the depth of the river and the many alligators prevented us.

In 1979, notice was given of the intention to enter the wreck of the *Young Australian* "Located in the Roper River, 6 km upstream from Nugkurr (Roper River Mission)" in the Register of the National Estate.⁵⁹ It was duly entered on 27 August 1980.⁶⁰

On 24 November 2002, the wreck of the *Young Australian*, along with "all appurtenances, fittings, parts, cargo, equipment and associated artefacts located within a 100 metres radius" was declared a "Heritage Object" under the Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act.⁶¹



Captain James Lowrie
[State Library SA B45266]

In 2010, Trevor Horman, chair of Engineering Heritage Australia's North group, nominated the wreck of the *Young Australian* for engineering heritage recognition. The wreck was the oldest in the Roper River and the only recorded paddle steamer wreck in Northern Territory waters.⁶² The site chosen for the recognition plaque was "a car park at a site called Tomato Island about 1.25 km downstream from the wreck site. This is the closest point that visitors can approach the wreck site by road and is the closest launching site to visit the wreck site by boat."⁶³

The plaque and an interpretation panel were unveiled by Kezia Purick MLA, Member for Goyder in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and Owen Peake, Chair of Engineering Heritage Australia, on 23 May 2010. But first the small group had to dig holes, mix concrete, and erect the panel and plaque.⁶⁴

James Lowrie

Born in Peterhead, on Scotland's east coast, on 2 May 1819, James Lowrie made his first trip to Australia as master of the 538 ton barque *Dreadnought*. It arrived at Port Adelaide on 9 June 1852 after departing Plymouth on 19 February, the eleven adult passengers and four children enduring a voyage of 110 days.⁶⁵ The *Dreadnought* also carried mail from 10 to 18 February, landing it four months later⁶⁶ – which underscores why Australia needed a telegraph connection. Lowrie's next stop was Melbourne but he didn't clear the harbour until 17 August, a layover of 69 days! He returned from Melbourne in September, this time with his wife and child in the cabin and 50 casks of British beer still in the hold.⁶⁷

The *Dreadnought* became a regular traveller between Adelaide and Melbourne, the agent claiming, "The accommodations of this beautiful ship are unsurpassed in the trade."⁶⁸ Lowrie had also established a reputation as a commander, "well and favourably known in the trade".⁶⁹ In May 1853, grateful passengers collected a purse of twenty sovereigns (more than \$2500 today) in appreciation of "the hospitality and urbanity of manner which you have shown us during the present voyage".⁷⁰ In early 1854, Lowrie was featured in the barque's advertising:⁷¹

From the comfort insured [sic] to her passengers, the well known urbanity of the Captain, and the punctuality characterising her trips, the *Dreadnought* now holds the highest place in public estimation.

In May 1854, Lowrie was given command of the iron screw-steamer *Havilah*, the first steam-powered vessel to make the Melbourne-Adelaide run.⁷² The *Havilah* had been built in 1853 for Charles and John Bowman and Hugh McMeckan (his name sometimes printed as McMeichan). As well as its screw propulsion, the vessel was also schooner-rigged with three masts and it was fitted with "every comfort and convenience for passengers".⁷³ McMeckan sailed the *Havilah* to Australia under canvas, departing England on 2 July and reaching Port Philip Heads on 17 October. Its much-anticipated maiden voyage was finally made in November.⁷⁴ Under Lowrie's command, the *Havilah* developed an excellent reputation, the *Argus* commenting in November 1855:⁷⁵

The *Havilah*, from Adelaide, arrived this afternoon, at her usual time. Captain Lowrie deserves credit for the regularity with which he performs his voyages. Though strongly opposed now in the trade, he manages to keep the time and go the pace with any of his opponents and always command a respectable number of passengers.

During this time, Lowrie was living in LeFevre Terrace, North Adelaide. Then, in March 1860, he left the colony, selling by auction all of his household furniture and effects.⁷⁶ He returned to Australia in December as captain of the barque *Formosa*, sailing from Mauritius. In February 1862 he had a less than successful voyage in attempting to import guaramier ("the best freshwater pond fish in the world"): only one small goldfish survived.⁷⁷ In October 1863, he was given command of another steamship, the *Hero*, which had been fitted out for carrying stock to New Zealand.⁷⁸ In April 1864, he was back on the Mauritius run in command of the *Dispatch*⁷⁹ and a few months after that was captaining the steamer *Barwon* which operated between Melbourne and Newcastle.⁸⁰ Again, the agents' advertising highlighted Lowrie's reputation: "The average passages of the *Barwon* under Captain Lowrie's command equal those of any steamer on the station."⁸¹ The next year, Lowrie began taking the *Barwon* across the Tasman, calling in at Hokitika, Nelson, Wellington and Auckland.⁸²

In June 1866, Lowrie blotted his copybook when he ran the *Barwon* aground on a sandy beach near Point Lonsdale.⁸³ The Steam Navigation Board found him guilty of gross negligence and suspended his certificate for six months.⁸⁴ Lowrie resumed his seafaring life in 1867 with command of various vessels such as the barque *Planter*.⁸⁵ In June 1870, he was given command of the barque



*Some of the work party at the Roper River depot: in the right foreground are surveyor Alexander Mitchell (white shirt), Robert Patterson (dark coat), Charles Todd, and Darwin Telegraph Master John Little
To the right can be seen the distinctive smokestack of the Young Australian
[State Library SA PRG742/5/87]*

*Golden Age*⁸⁶ and in March 1871 transferred to the smaller barque *Suffolk*.⁸⁷ When he arrived with it in Port Adelaide in April, the *Advertiser* said: "The master, Captain Lowrie, will be recognised as a very old friend by some of the Portonians, seeing he passed several of his early years in the steam line when first it was established to and from Melbourne."⁸⁸ His reputation restored, he was appointed master of the *Young Australian* at the end of that year.

After the loss of the *Young Australian*, James Lowrie stayed on at the Roper River and was appointed as acting customs officer. He also got to know some of the local Aboriginal people and "picked up a good deal of their language".⁸⁹

He still had hopes of refloating the *Young Australian* and said, in a letter dated 23 August 1873:⁹⁰

I am now preparing what material has been sent me for floating the *Young Australian*; but will not commence operations until assured of continuous application to the work. She is in the same condition as ever — not a bit the worse in hull to all appearance. The machinery of course is in a very dirty state; but there is nothing seriously wrong.

After the Roper River

After nearly two years at the Roper River, James Lowrie was given the job of taking the government steamer *Enterprise* back to Adelaide. This little vessel, powered by an 18 horsepower engine, was a "long, narrow, light draught craft, especially adapted to river purposes."⁹¹ He left the Roper on 27 December 1873 and reached Darwin on 5 January 1874 after several days being held up by bad weather.⁹² He then received instructions to take the *Enterprise* back to Adelaide⁹³ and left Darwin on 4 February.⁹⁴ Stopping a week at a time for repairs in

Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, the *Enterprise* made it as far as Cape Jervis and finally needed a tow up the Gulf, arriving in Adelaide on 30 April.⁹⁵

In June 1874, Lowrie travelled to Sydney to take over command of the screw steamer *Lord Ashley*⁹⁶ and departed for Brisbane, Townsville and Cooktown on his first voyage entirely in Queensland waters.⁹⁷ He then worked for the Queensland Steamship Company, being given command of several vessels including the *Corea*, the *Maranoa*, and the *Archer*. In July 1884, at the age of 65, he announced his resignation after completing a trip from Sydney to Brisbane in the *Archer*. The *Brisbane Courier* said:⁹⁸

Captain Lowrie's long term of service on this coast, coupled with his genial character and sterling good qualities, has won for him the lasting friendship and good wishes of a very large circle of friends. The announcement of his resignation will therefore be heard with regret. It will no doubt be within the recollection of many that when some time ago the Q. S. S. Company contemplated taking the steamer *Corea*, which Captain Lowrie then commanded, off the Thursday Island trade, the Gulf people showed their appreciation of Lowrie's character by presenting him with a good purse of sovereigns.

Lowrie then embarked on a new career, becoming one of the first licensed Queensland Coast and Torres Strait Pilots on 24 August 1884.⁹⁹ For the next 12 years, Lowrie put his long experience to work, taking vessels along the eastern coast from Sydney to the Whitsundays. Then, on 9 July 1896, he was taken ill while piloting the *Bucephalus* through the Inner Route and was found dead in the chart room. He was, said the *Sydney Evening News*, "very popular both ashore and afloat by reason of his many genial qualities".¹⁰⁰

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3. *SA Gazette and Mining Journal*, 19 May 1849, p3b
4. *SA Register*, 21 June 1854, p2a
5. *Argus*, 17 June 1854, p7a
6. *Argus*, 29 November 1854, p5d
7. *Adelaide Times*, 20 June 1854, p3d
8. *SA Register*, 21 June 1854, p2a
9. *SA Register*, 22 June 1854, p1a
10. *SA Register*, 26 June 1854, p2h
11. *SA Register*, 28 June 1854, p3a
12. *SA Register*, 30 June 1854, p2a
13. *Adelaide Times*, 29 July 1854, p3c
14. *SA Register*, 30 August 1854, p2h
15. *Adelaide Times*, 12 October 1854, p2d
16. *SA Register*, 1 November 1854, p2a
17. *Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser*, 26 October 1854, p2cd
18. *Adelaide Observer*, 25 November 1854, p3g
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20. *Adelaide Times*, 21 November 1854, p4c
21. *Adelaide Times*, 27 November 1854, p3e
22. *SA Register*, 16 July 1855, p2a
23. *Adelaide Times*, 7 November 1855, p2a
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26. *Adelaide Times*, 14 December 1857, p2d
27. *Adelaide Times*, 11 February 1856, p2a
28. *Adelaide Times*, 16 February 1856, p2b
29. *SA Advertiser*, 10 January 1861, p2g
30. *SA Register*, 27 November 1871, p4b
31. *Adelaide Observer*, 15 July 1871, p13b
32. *Adelaide Observer*, 26 August 1871, p7f
33. *Adelaide Observer*, 24 June 1871, p4c
34. *SA Advertiser*, 24 June 1871, p1f
35. *SA Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 29 July 1871, p11b
36. *SA Register*, 28 July 1871, p6b
37. *Evening Journal*, 30 November 1871, p2b
38. *Express and Telegraph*, 4 November 1871, p1a
39. *Adelaide Observer*, 23 December 1871, p8c
40. *SA Register*, 26 December 1871, p5b
41. *Evening Journal*, 25 January 1872, p2c
42. A copy of Lowrie's journal is held by the Northern Territory University and is quoted extensively in a report prepared by the Heritage Branch, NT Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport, Darwin, in 2010; hereinafter NRETAS, 2010
43. The barque *Bengal*, which had been taking fare-paying passengers to the Northern Territory, had been chartered in Darwin to replace the *Gulnare* which had run aground on its way out of the harbour [SA Register, 5 December 1871, p3d]
44. The steamer *Tararua*, which normally operated on the trans-Tasman route, was chartered by the SA Government to transport men, stock and materials to the NT [SA Register, 26 January 1872, p5b]
45. Maria Island is a small island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, about 20 miles off-shore from the mouth of the Roper River, which was used as a staging post during the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line
46. *SA Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 31 August 1872, p10f
47. Captain Calder said he left Darwin on 5 October and the Roper "was reached in four days" [Adelaide Observer, 16 November 1872, p10e]
48. *Adelaide Observer*, 16 November 1872, p10e
49. *Adelaide Observer*, 11 January 1873, p11cd
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79. *Adelaide Observer*, 30 April 1864, p5a
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83. *Brisbane Courier*, 29 June 1866, p2f
84. *Argus*, 5 July 1866, pp4g,5a
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86. *Argus*, 29 June 1870, p4b
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88. *SA Advertiser*, 20 April 1871, p2a
89. *Northern Argus* (Rockhampton), 12 March 1874, p2g
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91. *SA Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 2 May 1874, p15c
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93. *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 23 January 1874, p2d
94. *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 6 February 1874, p2a
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